

To the Members of the Program Investigation and Review Committee,

My name is Carol Barans, and I am here to speak to you both as a parent of a young man with Asperger's Syndrome and as a consultant and advocate with Autism Services and Resources Connecticut who has worked with many families of teens and young adults with ASD in their efforts to prepare their sons and daughters for the transition from high school to adult life.

When my son was 17, I realized that I would not be able to continue full time employment and at the same time develop and provide the kinds of experiences he would need in order to acquire the skills to be competitively employed as an adult. This was not because of a lack of intelligence or effort (he graduated in the top 25% of his high school class and is on the dean's list in college) but because he had not developed the soft skills of employment: the interpersonal skills, flexibility, coping with multiple tasks and managers, disruptions and criticism and re-direction, etc.

**So I retired and took part time employment.** In the succeeding years, my husband and I developed our own transition program for our son using mentors and coaches for him to learn how to succeed on a college campus, and how to work, beginning with two years of volunteer jobs as we coached him on how to handle the myriad social interactions that occur during a work day.

Now, 7 years later, he is employed part time and goes to college part time and mostly independently handles the variety of demands placed on him from managing the academic load to showing up for work with a positive attitude.

Obviously, not everyone has the option of retiring and not all parents have my special education background. Most families have to rely on their school systems to prepare their children for life after high school. The reality in Connecticut is that few school systems have the expertise, the programs and the approaches that are effective in preparing students with ASD for employment and independent living. For example:

- I still find many instances when parents have been encouraged to allow their son/daughters to take their diplomas after 4 years of high school in the naïve assumption that either college or adult services will prepare them to work. They not informed that their children with ASD, like all students with disabilities, are entitled to a public education until age 21.
- The services that many school systems offer are not sufficiently individualized to be effective for students with ASD. Many of their approaches have been developed for a population of students with intellectual disability and do not produce independence in students with ASD.
- Another major issue is that parents are not informed that adult services operate differently than schools and have different eligibility and expectations. There is a huge gap between the level of preparation students receive from schools and the level of performance that the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services expects in order to help some one find a job.
- And finally, the agency designated to assist individuals with ASD, who do not also have intellectual disability, has such limited funding that its waiting list much longer than the number of individual served.

The net result of all of these is that many capable individuals with the potential to live and work competitively and independently are not doing so. They are marginalized and isolated. I recommend several remedies:

1. Parents need to learn what they can do to help prepare their children with ASD for independence.
2. The SDE needs to insist that schools provide more effective transition programs for youth with ASD
3. The BRS needs to be funded differently so that it could to provide some pre-employment training and a level of long term supports for individuals with ASD
4. The DDS Autism Medicaid Waiver program needs increased funding.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.